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SUBJECT: SUDAN - THE BLUES OF BLUE NILE STATE

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SUMMARY  
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(U) Blue Nile State has a strong potential for agricultural production, yet chronic underdevelopment and lasting damage from civil war hamper progress. USAID food aid assistance benefits returnees and communities in this Three Areas state, yet needs persist for basic services, including health, water and sanitation, education, and livelihoods. End summary.

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BLUE NILE IN NEED  
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1. (U) Blue Nile State, which lies in the fertile woodland savannah belt of eastern Sudan, has a strong potential for agricultural production. However, several challenges exist for this special administrative area as defined in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

War destroyed most basic infrastructure, particularly in the southern portion of the state, and poor roads render many rural areas inaccessible during the rainy season. In addition, access to drinking water is far below minimum Sphere standards at five liters per person per day in Kurmuk locality, where many returning refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are settling. Poor sanitation conditions contribute to the further spread of illnesses such as diarrhea and trachoma.

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FOOD FOR EVERYTHING  
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2. (U) USAID funds the UN World Food Program (WFP) to carry out a host of emergency food aid programs throughout Blue Nile State. In 2007, WFP is engaged in General Food Distributions (GFD), Food for Education (FFE), Food for Training (FFT), Food for Recovery (FFR) and Institutional Feeding (IF) programs.

3. (U) General food distributions target organized and spontaneous refugee and IDP returnees in 2007, as well as 2006 returnees. Current year returnees receive full rations while prior year returnees receive half rations. WFP is currently targeting 3,268 returnees in Damazine locality and 19,575 in Kurmuk locality.

¶4. (U) In order to support reintegration in resettlement areas, WFP provides Food for Education to promote improved quality and access to education, particularly for girls. In northern Blue Nile, WFP FFE programs target 47 schools benefiting 15,733 students. An additional 16 schools and 6,745 students receive hot meals through the WFP program in southern Blue Nile. Local communities engage through parent associations, which provide firewood, cooks, and additional food items where needed. While participating schools in southern Blue Nile expanded from nine to 16 over the past year, inaccessibility due to UN security restrictions reduced the number of participating schools in the northern portion of the state from 83 to 47.

¶5. (U) Food for Training programs in southern Blue Nile provide take home rations for 480 women and 120 men participating in literacy classes. The program aims to enhance women's reading and writing skills, knowledge, and confidence, and encourage participation in the local community decision making process. Providing food at the literacy courses encourages women to attend regularly.

¶6. (U) A Food for Recovery project is planned to improve the food security and livelihoods of 1,084 men and 1,000 women in Challi, Kurmuk locality. Beneficiaries will receive individual rations for 60 days while carrying out community-initiated resettlement activities.

¶7. (U) An Institutional Feeding program scheduled for 620 individuals per month in Roseries and Damazine localities and Kurmuk hospital aims to reduce child mortality, improve child health, and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases.

¶8. (U) In order to address the pressing need for increased access to water in Blue Nile, WFP is exploring the use of Food for Work interventions to build water catchments. As heavy soil in the state requires machinery for digging, WFP is seeking an NGO to provide equipment as a complement to additional FFW activities.

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¶9. (U) WFP has successfully pre-positioned food at local distribution points to minimize delays in food delivery during the rainy season. In addition, WFP has trained relief committees at each site to carry out the food distribution in the event that rains prevent the presence of WFP staff. USAID field staff recommends monitoring the performance of the relief committees to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach.

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NEEDS AND CHALLENGES  
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¶10. (U) Needs in Blue Nile are great, particularly for water and sanitation, health, education, and livelihoods support. Schools often lack text books, trained teachers, and clean water. In some locations, school meals are prepared using untreated river water, and students drink directly from the river, both of which pose significant health hazards. Resettlement sites lack holistic programming, with most returnees receiving food without other basic services that would support resettlement and reintegration. This lack of basic services may encourage some returnees for a reverse return.

¶11. (U) Several hurdles to expanded services exist, including the threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs), and UN security restrictions marking several locations "no-go". Low local government capacity and the limited presence of relief organizations also present obstacles to needed relief to development programming.

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RECOMMENDATIONS  
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¶12. (U) An in-depth assessment should be carried out in Blue Nile State to identify specific needs and explore possible support for basic services to areas of resettlement. In addition, the provision

of agricultural inputs to returnees would help them to transition from reliance on food rations to self-sustenance.

¶13. (U) Related to WFP operations, an additional storage facility is needed in Kurmuk. Food currently stored in a non-WFP facility is at risk of contamination from petrol and rodents. Parent associations responsible for managing food storage sites at schools require training on storage and handling of commodities. Also, a follow-up evaluation on food distributions conducted by local relief committees in the absence of WFP staff during the rainy season is recommended to determine the effectiveness of this approach.

FERNANDEZ